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**CLINICAL ADVISORY**  
**Dramatic Increases in Syphilis Raise Concern**

**To:** Departments of Internal Medicine, Family Medicine, Emergency Medicine, Dermatology,  
and Infectious Diseases  
Community Health Centers  
HIV/AIDS Clinical Care Providers

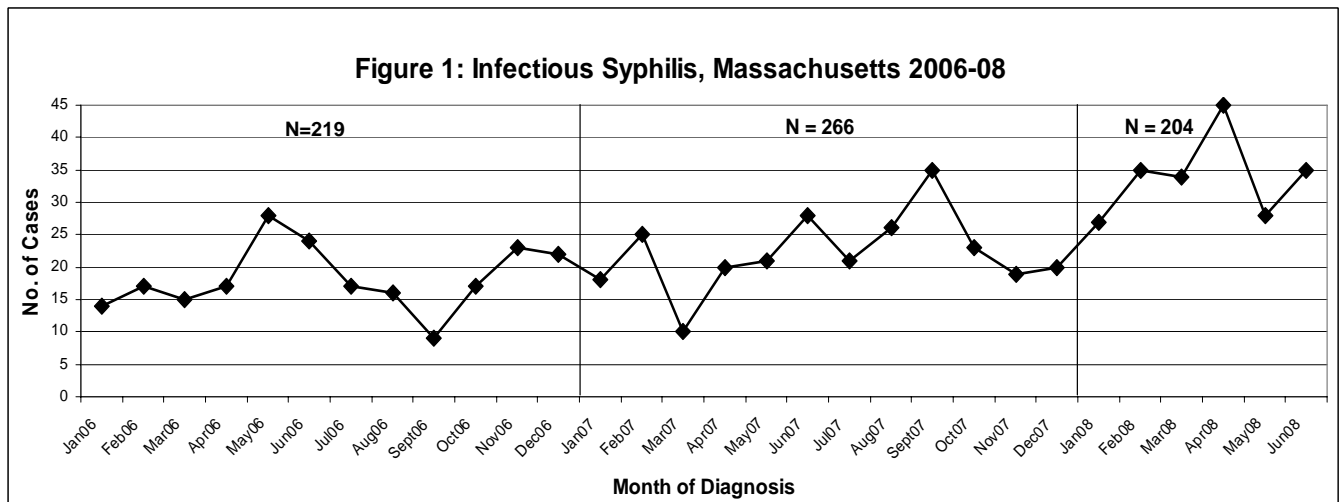
**From:** Katherine Hsu, MD, MPH, Medical Director, Division of STD Prevention  
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**Date:** September, 2008

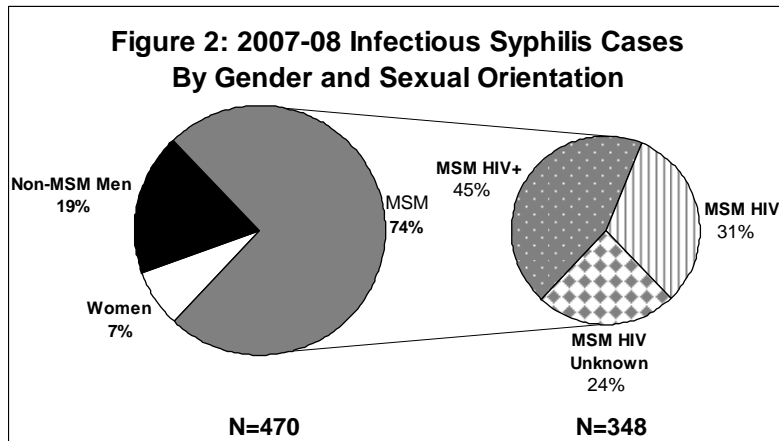
**Re:** Emerging Trends in Syphilis in Men Who Have Sex With Men, 2007-08

**New data for 2008 indicate that infectious syphilis (primary, secondary, and early latent syphilis) continues to climb in the first half of 2008, continuing a trend first noted in late 2007. The majority of cases are in men who have sex with men (MSM).**

- From 2006 to 2007, there was a 21% increase in reported infectious syphilis cases, occurring predominantly because of rises in the second half of 2007 (Figure 1).
- From first half of 2007 compared to first half of 2008, there was a 67% increase in reported infectious syphilis cases (Figure 1).



- In 2007 and 2008, approximately three-quarters of infectious syphilis cases were in self-identified MSM. Slightly under half of infectious syphilis cases were in self-identified HIV+ MSM (Figure 2).



**The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) therefore wishes to highlight the several important resources available for your use.**

#### ***Resources for Clinicians***

- **Screening Guidelines:** Since 2002, CDC has recommended that MSM be screened at least annually for syphilis, gonorrhea, chlamydia and HIV. More frequent screening at 3–6 month intervals is indicated for MSM who have multiple or anonymous partners, sex in conjunction with illicit drug use, or sex partners who participate in these activities. Obtaining a sexual history on all patients is therefore key to determining who should be screened more frequently. <http://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment/2006/specialpops.htm#specialpops4>
- **Treatment Guidelines:** Treatment of syphilis in an HIV-infected individual does not differ from treatment of syphilis in a non-HIV-infected individual in terms of drug of choice (penicillin). However, some experts recommend longer courses of penicillin, and have a lower threshold for performing a lumbar puncture to rule out neurosyphilis before choosing the length of penicillin therapy for syphilis in HIV-infected individuals. <http://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment/2006/genital-ulcers.htm#genulc6>
- **Provider Toolkit:** In partnership with Fenway Community Health, the MDPH developed “Prevention and Management of STDs in MSM: A Toolkit for Clinicians.” This resource provides practical tips such as how to conduct a sexual risk assessment with individual patients, and how to make your practice more welcoming to sexual minorities. [http://www.mass.gov/Eeohhs2/docs/dph/cdc/std/std\\_prevention\\_msm\\_toolkit.pdf](http://www.mass.gov/Eeohhs2/docs/dph/cdc/std/std_prevention_msm_toolkit.pdf)

#### ***Resources for Patients***

- **Web-based:** In partnership with Fenway Community Health, the MDPH has developed a website for MSM that includes information on STD prevention, a listing of MSM health web resources, and a searchable map to locate STD/HIV testing and treatment in Massachusetts. <http://gettestedboston.org>
- **Fact Sheets:** Plain language fact sheets for your patients are downloadable from <http://www.mass.gov/dph/cdc/factsheets> and are available upon request by calling (617) 983-6940. A sample of the syphilis plain language fact sheet is enclosed, together with our order form for fact sheets.
- **Partner Notification Services:** Because infectious syphilis has a prolonged incubation period (up to 90 days), notifying partners of infectious syphilis cases and bringing partners in for presumptive treatment will interrupt the chain of transmission. MDPH therefore prioritizes all cases of infectious syphilis for partner management by Disease Intervention Specialists (DIS), who specialize in confidential interviewing of infectious syphilis cases, followed by anonymous partner notification. DIS also can perform Internet partner notification of infectious syphilis contacts, for those cases who only know their partners by screen name. A brochure entitled “Taking the Next Steps to Protect You & Your Partner” has been created to inform patients about what to expect from the MDPH when they are diagnosed with syphilis. A sample of this brochure is enclosed, and is available upon request by calling (617) 983-6940. *Please give this brochure to your syphilis-infected patients.*

**As always, the Division of STD Prevention at the MDPH remains available for consultation. Please contact us if you have any questions. Our phone number is (617) 983-6940 and our website is <http://www.mass.gov/dph/cdc/std>.**